Aberdeenshire
COUNCIL

From Mountain to Sea

BUSINESS SERVICES

DIRECTORATE PLAN
2020 – 2022

February 2021

CONTENTS

FOREWORD

I am delighted to introduce the Directorate Plan for Business Services. This plan provides an overview of all our services and as you will see it describes our organisational arrangements alongside information on staffing, budget and performance. This is very much set in the context of strategic and local issues and reflects the Council's own priorities. Importantly we also set out our Directorate Action Plan in Appendix 2 – this will continue to be kept under review and will be brought forward to Business Services Committee for regular oversight and monitoring.

Where appropriate we have provided links to other detailed documents and that reflects one of the areas that this plan will continue to progress and develop which is around that outward look in terms of benchmarking and searching out good practice elsewhere. Continuous improvement is integral to our practice and this plan helps set out how we will take that forward.

The nature of Business Services is such that as well as delivering specific services of our own directly to our communities, we also work with and support a range of other services across the Council. Working with colleagues efficiently and effectively is critical in helping deliver the outcomes sought by the Council for our residents and our communities. We also recognise the important contribution of working in our localities and across all our areas is equally critical – as we understand the impact resulting from recent and continuing challenges. More broadly, the Council has an excellent reputation with regard to partnership working and in Business Services we intend to reinforce that positive reputation.

We fully embrace the One Aberdeenshire Principles, as demonstrated by the commitment of colleagues across Business Services who are continuing to go the extra mile to ensure we support our communities at the most critical of times. I am grateful and proud of the way everyone has responded and thank all colleagues for all they have given. We have learned much over the last year and as we look forward this Plan sets out our own vision and direction. The Plan builds on what we have achieved, our ongoing commitment to supporting the wellbeing of our colleagues, embracing progressive ways of working, providing innovative, forward thinking and trusted advice and services to protect and promote the interests of Aberdeenshire Council, in the context of the Council priorities.

I hope you find this Plan both informative and stimulating and I am very much looking forward to playing my part in working with colleagues, councillors and all stakeholders in helping deliver on the commitments set out in our Directorate Plan.

Ritchie Johnson

Director of Business Services

1. INTRODUCTION

The Aberdeenshire Council Plan provides the strategic policy framework for the delivery of services by the Council. The Council Plan is the Council's corporate plan and covers two years from 2020-2022.
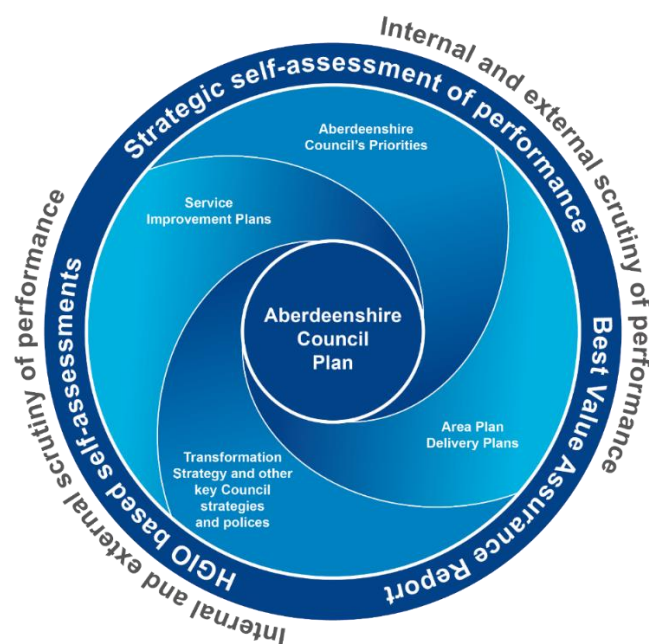
The Council Plan is implemented through six strategic priorities, namely education, health and wellbeing, infrastructure, resilient communities, economy and enterprise, and estate modernisation and the day-to-day work carried out by services across the Council.

Directorate Plans are an essential element of the Council's performance management and improvement framework. They set out the key issues for delivering services in support of the Council vision and priorities, provide a focus on performance improvement and describe directorate specific risks that may impact on the delivery of the service.

The Directorate Plans need to be strongly rooted in the community impact assessment, with a firm focus on working with our partners and communities to deliver those priorities identified by our residents as important to them during this recovery and renewal period.

Directorate Plans are informed by the Strategic Assessment 2019/20, the Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2020 (MTFS), Community Impact Assessment and Workforce Planning. The MTFS is designed to ensure that council services remain financially sustainable in the current economic climate. Directorate Plans should align clearly with the Council Plan and Community Planning Partnership priorities. They should also clearly demonstrate how they will support delivery of corporate improvement action plans including the Child Poverty Action Plan, How Good is Our Governance and the Best Value Assurance Report 2020.

The diagram below provides a graphic representation of the Council's performance management framework and shows the strategic context within which directorate plans sit. It also shows the wider performance management and improvement framework which the Council has adopted to ensure rigorous scrutiny of performance and drive directorate across the Council.

2. STRATEGIC CONTEXT

The Council Plan 2017-2022 was approved at Full Council at its meeting on 23 November 2017, providing strategic direction through the confirmation of 11 priorities which would provide a focus for the delivery of council services and how the council would engage and work with partners, communities, businesses and the third sector in future years.

The Covid-19 pandemic has, from March 2020, had a huge impact on Aberdeenshire communities, the economy (both locally and nationally) and on public services. In response, Aberdeenshire Council decided that a new set of priorities should be developed which better reflect and address the challenges being faced currently by the council and the wider community.

A new Council Plan 2020-22 was developed and thereafter agreed by Aberdeenshire Council in October 2020. The Plan is centred around three pillars aimed at supporting wider recovery. Under the three pillars sit six Strategic Priorities:

Our People
- Education
- Health & Wellbeing

Our Environment
- Infrastructure
- Resilient Communities

Our Economy
- Economy & Enterprise
- Estate Modernisation

The Strategic Priorities will help fulfil Aberdeenshire Council's vision to be the best area for those who wish to live, learn, work and play here whilst ensuring the area is served by the best council.

Underpinning the six Strategic Priorities are a number of key principles which are directly relevant to and supported by Business Services:

- right people, right places, right time
- responsible finances
- climate and sustainability
- community Planning Partnership Local Outcome Improvement Plans
- human rights and public protection
- tackling poverty and inequalities
- digital infrastructure and economy

2.1 Council Plan

The nature of Business Services is to provide professional and business support to all Services within the Council and as such will input to and provide a supporting role in helping deliver many of the Council Priorities.

Business Services has a lead role for the delivery of the following Council Priorities:-
❖ **Effective delivery of the Council's priorities through a programme of digital innovation and web-based services.** This Council Priority contributes to the delivery of the Resilient Communities strategic priority.

❖ **Our workforce plans are sustainable, affordable and supports employee wellbeing.** This Council Priority contributes to the delivery of the Health & Wellbeing strategic priority.

❖ **Income is maximised through reducing costs alongside commercialisation.** This Council Priority contributes to the delivery of the Economy & Enterprise strategic priority.

❖ **We have an estate that is sustainable, efficient and fit for purpose.** This Council Priority contributes to the delivery of the Estate Modernisation strategic priority.

Details of how we intend to deliver on these priorities is included in the Action Plan attached as Appendix 2.

Business Services also has lead responsibility for the key principle of Tackling Poverty & Inequalities. The Tackling Poverty & Inequalities Team sits within the Area Manager (Buchan)'s support team and plays a key role in addressing one of the Community Planning Partnerships key priorities which is reducing child poverty. Information relating to Tackling Poverty & Inequalities has been detailed in section 2.3.1.

2.2 Area Plans

Area Plans have been developed to show the Council's intentions for developments and projects which affect each of the six areas within Aberdeenshire during the period of the Council Plan and also provide a clear performance and scrutiny framework. The actions identified in the Area Plans include those actions identified in the Directorate Plan that have a specific Area dimension as well as actions that reflect contact and dialogue with local communities, community groups, organisations and individuals as well as with Community Planning Partners. Responsibility for Area Plans lies with Area Management Teams which consist of cross-representation of services at a senior level and the plans will provide Local Elected Members oversight of service delivery in their area as well as allowing the required scrutiny.

Area Plans will:
- set out Directorate Plans at an area level
- capture and reflect council and community priorities and delivery of actions
- collate proposed service delivery and give Area Committees oversight of the service delivery in their area
- allow the required scrutiny and monitoring that is specific to the area and provide the opportunity for the formal scrutiny process to be taken forward by Area Committee
- support Area Committees as the decision makers on local issues
- have regard to the public sector quality duty and the climate change commitment recognised by the Council
- provide linkage between the Council and the Community Planning priorities

- reflect and complement statutory and other community plans relative to each area e.g. Local Outcome Improvement Plans (LOIPs), Locality Plans, Community Safety, Community Justice, Children's Services, Health & Social Care Partnership (HSCP)

Whilst many of the actions to be taken by Business Services to deliver the Council Priorities will be planned and managed across Aberdeenshire, some actions will have a specific Area dimension and will be included in Area Plans.

2.3 Local and National Policy issues

There are a range of local and national policy issues which impact on the services to be delivered by Business Services. The following summarises the main issues affecting Business Services and the actions being taken as a result.

Area Managers (Buchan & Formartine):
Continued response to, and recovery from, the Covid-19 pandemic and the impact of Brexit will remain the significant local and national policy issues that impact on communities and the role of Area Managers and teams to provide leadership and guidance to support resilience within communities will continue to influence the work of Area teams.

Customer & Digital Services (C&DS):
Aberdeenshire's Digital Strategy aligns with the Digital Strategy for Scotland and the actions required to realise Aberdeenshire's ambition will be reflected in our Digital Strategy Roadmap.

The Coronavirus Regulations and associated guidance and pressure on services as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic have been amplified which has highlighted a need for staff mobilisation and service prioritisation as well as welfare policies to be continually refreshed and cascaded. Briefings are provided for Members on COSLA reports and the Corporate Policy team also produces the monthly Policy Bulletin to share local and national policy news as well as information on consultations, events and training, Local Government Improvement Unit (LGIU) briefings. The Business Strategy team ensures that Members are made aware of Audit Scotland reports and bulletins are posted on Ward Pages.

Regulations on the accessibility of public sector websites came into force in September 2020 setting a legal duty for the Council to make its website accessible. The Council must publish accessibility statements and explain how accessible our website is. The aim of the legislation is to help make sure online public services are available to all users including people with disabilities. The regulations mean that all documents published on the Council and Community Planning Partnership websites meet the accessibility standards.

The impact of Brexit will take time to be properly understood but work is underway to signpost relevant information on our website www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/brexit

Commercial & Procurement Shared Services (CPSS):
In recent months and for the foreseeable future, Covid-19 pandemic recovery and Brexit represent the major local and national policy issues affecting Commercial & Procurement Shared Services.

CPSS continues to demonstrate agility in responding to Scottish Procurement Policy Notes, COSLA requirements, statutory consultations and other regulatory guidance and best practice e.g. supplier profiling, supplier relief and business continuity risk.
Action has been targeted where business continuity risk is particularly acute and could impact on our most vulnerable citizens. For example, the Social Care team have worked with the

HSCP and all providers of social care services to implement policy on supplier sustainability during the Covid-19 pandemic supporting compliance with National Principles for Sustainability and remobilisation payments issued jointly by Health and Social Care Scotland and COSLA. The team has worked collaboratively with Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City Councils to implement a consistent process, to the benefit of both councils and all service providers that are often shared between the two councils.

Finance:

The Scottish Government has provided additional financial resources to support local communities affected by the Covid-19 pandemic measures. A number of Business Grants have been administered and continue to be distributed in line with national guidance to support the Aberdeenshire business community. Further support is also being provided to our customers including self-isolation payments, additional free school meals payments, hardship funds and crisis grants in line with national guidance.

Finance continues to demonstrate flexibility and agility in responding to the pandemic but also ensuring any changes to legislation are implemented along with COSLA requirements and other statutory duties including the setting of, billing and collection of Council Tax and Business Rates and the administration of Housing Benefits, Council Tax Reduction, Discretionary Housing Payments, Crisis Grants, Community Care Grants, Money and Welfare advice, Free Schools Meals and School Clothing Grants as well as blue badge applications. The service continues to invest and encourage the use of on-line offering and is actively working towards a more self-service model for budget holders across the Council.

In response to the pandemic and the Council's financial position, the Service is leading on the implementation of changes to pay and conditions of service, whether nationally or locally agreed, undertaking the required development, modelling and impact assessment.

The payroll system and associated processes continue to be enhanced with the further rollout of self-service functionality. Improvements to reporting functionality, allowing access to real-time workforce data, supports the Council's response to the pandemic and is integral to the development of service workforce reports.

The Finance service plays an important role in the overall financial management of the Council in facilitating the preparation of the Council's financial plans, policies, budgets and accounts, ensuring effective budget monitoring and control, undertaking treasury management, providing financial advice and reporting on financial performance.

Internal Audit:

Internal Audit will continue to support, and where appropriate challenge, progress with policy implementation and the associated impact on internal controls, governance and risk management. Internal Audit will always give consideration to the risks facing the Council when preparing planned work. The risks associated with the Covid-19 pandemic and the Council's response to this will be considered when developing the Audit Plan for 2021/22. Areas of interest include new ways of working, revised governance arrangements, financial sustainability and the impact of the pandemic on vulnerable groups.

Legal & People:

The workforce implications arising from the budget and Brexit have been the main drivers for local and national policy change. In the last year, a framework of workforce planning has been put in place encompassing the national and local picture. The strategic document "Our Future Workforce" outlines the aspirations for the organisation. Added to this are service workforce plans which will be in place by the spring of 2021. The workforce plans will capture the key steps

required to shape a workforce fit for the future, including terms and conditions, pay strategy, service redesign, wellbeing, absence and performance management, re-skilling, voluntary severance, national recruitment and retention campaigns, and the digitalisation of services. In addition, there may be a period of legal uncertainty as a result of Brexit particularly, for example, in relation to Governance, procurement and commercial contracts.

Property & Facilities Management:
The Council is the largest construction client in the region, with public sector overall contributing more than half of the nation's £8bn expenditure on construction: with the construction sector providing 6% of Scotland's GDP; hence the importance of construction to the economy.

In addition, the Council has the largest portfolio of property assets in the North East with the use of those assets having a direct correlation to the quality of services being delivered; whilst the investment portfolio helps both stimulate economic activity and provides income generation to the Council.

2.3.1 Tackling Poverty & Inequalities

The Scottish Government has made a commitment in tackling poverty and inequalities across Scotland. The work on tackling poverty spans a number of policy areas and is outlined within The Fairer Scotland Action Plan which consists of five high-level ambitions.

- A Fairer Scotland For All
- Ending Child Poverty
- A Strong Start For All Young People
- Fairer Working Lives
- A Thriving Third Age

Specifically in relation to ending child poverty, the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 places a statutory requirement on Local Authorities and Health Boards to jointly prepare and submit, to the Scottish Government, an annual "Local Child Poverty Action Report" identifying actions that have been taken in the previous 12 months and what action will be taken in the future to reduce child poverty. Aberdeenshire Council agreed a Child Poverty Action Plan 2018-2028 in April 2019 and the Action Report is reported annually to Communities Committee. The Child Poverty Action Plan is also the delivery plan for the Aberdeenshire Local Outcomes Improvement Plan 2017-2027 and the priority 'Reducing Child Poverty'. This priority is one of three priorities set by the Community Planning Partnership, the other two being Changing our Relationship with Alcohol and Connected & Cohesive Communities. A link to the most recent Community Planning Partnership Annual Report can be found here.

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic 2.1% of Aberdeenshire's population was living in six data zones identified as being in the most deprived 20% of Scotland and seven times more likely to be employment deprived compared to the average for Aberdeenshire. The child poverty profile for Aberdeenshire highlighted that in 2018/19 4,289 children and young people in Aberdeenshire aged under 16, were living in Absolute poverty (Absolute low-income families). The data has also highlighted 5,089 children and young people in Aberdeenshire aged under 16, were living in Relative poverty (Relative low-income families). In relation to Child Poverty 65% of children in poverty do have at least one adult in work. Evidence indicates that the impact of the pandemic will increase poverty despite actions being taken to try and reduce it. In particular, the impact is likely to be heightened for certain groups, including low-paid workers, under-employed workers, and women and ethnic minorities, who were already struggling before the pandemic. Areas with a high number of low-paid at-risk jobs will be heavily impacted by the threat of rising poverty.

The Tackling Poverty & Inequalities Team supports the Tackling Poverty & Inequalities Strategic Partnership (Aberdeenshire Community Planning Partnership) which coordinates strategic development in order to:

- improve the lives of disadvantaged people across Aberdeenshire
- utilise the Fairer Aberdeenshire Funding to address poverty holistically
- reducing the number of households living in poverty
- preventing households falling into poverty
- enabling children to live poverty free in adult life
- improve the wellbeing of people living in poverty

The priorities of the Partnership are:

- invest in services and projects that address the causes of poverty, not its symptoms.
- support services & projects that deliver early interventions for vulnerable individuals, families and disadvantaged communities
- facilitate joint working and co-location between local partners ensuring service delivery is integrated increasing accessibility
- promote the voice of lived experience is used to inform practice and co-produce services

To comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty, all projects and spend through the Fairer Aberdeenshire Fund, the budget supporting the work of the Tackling Poverty & Inequalities partnership, is supported by an Equality Impact Assessment. In Aberdeenshire, our approach to tackling poverty focusses on early intervention and prevention, tackling the root causes of poverty and building people's capabilities through income maximisation, employability and promoting positive life chances.

Aberdeenshire's Local Voices Forum, a forum of households with lived experience of poverty and representing all Protected Characteristics, influences and informs service design and delivery.

Key achievements and positive messages are:

- The additional funding secured using the Fairer Aberdeenshire Fund as a match is £734,650
- Client financial gain is over £4.5 million resulting in, on average, an additional £500 per household
- Over 10,700 people have accessed online information & support
- Increased income maximisation support has resulted in an additional 613 low-income households increase their income by at least £90 per month
- Across Aberdeenshire 27 food projects have been financially supported resulting in 2697 food parcels/boxes being delivered per month
- The voice of lived experience is a priority therefore 1924 individuals have been involved with service redesign to ensure service delivery continued through the range of restrictions which occurred during 2020
- Across Aberdeenshire 30,510 individuals have been supported through Fairer Aberdeenshire funded projects
- Using the new Information & Advice framework 8,666 people have accessed information & advice services through a blended approach of online, phone & face to face
- Through the range of funded programmes 1,363 adults and 942 young people have accessed support and opportunities which have improved their skills
- Partners have secured 110 digital kits to support low-income households to become digitally engaged

2.4 Public Sector Equality Duty

Under the Equality Act 2010, the Council has a duty to demonstrate that we consciously consider or have due regard to our equality obligations. In order to meet our legal obligations under the 2010 Equality Act, the Council must report every two years on progress in making equalities integral to our activities. The most recent report published 2019 can be found here.

Business Services discharges the public sector equality duty by adhering to Aberdeenshire Council's Equalities Policy.

The Fairer Scotland Duty Part 1 of the Equality Act 2010 places a legal responsibility on particular public bodies in Scotland to actively consider ('pay due regard' to) how they can reduce inequalities of outcome caused by socioeconomic disadvantage, when making strategic decisions. To fulfil the obligation under The Fairer Scotland Duty, the Council must be able to meet two key requirements:
1. To actively consider how we could reduce inequalities of outcome in any decision we make;
2. To publish a written assessment, showing how we have done this.

The Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) allows us to assess the impact of the Council's policies, procedures and functions on those that have Protected Characteristics and are at risk of socio-economic deprivation within Aberdeenshire. It enables us to make balanced judgements in all decisions.

Area Managers and their teams will continue to ensure that Equalities considerations are embedded within working practices and local decision making. Through effective community engagement, communities, regardless of Protected Characteristics can participate in decision making and influence policy decisions and service delivery that impacts on them.

Customer & Digital Services (C&DS) has lead responsibility for Equalities ensuring that Equality Impact Assessments are undertaken when required and providing support to officers and members around Equalities issues. The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated and inflamed inequalities in our communities and its impact on those with protected characteristics and those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds is well documented. The Equalities team will support Services to ensure that Equalities considerations are embedded in strategic decision making when any changes to service provision are being considered to ensure that Members are provided with robust assessments detailing impacts on those with protected characteristics throughout the decision-making process. Communities and residents need to be reassured that the Council is taking steps to mitigate negative impacts of decision making.

An Integrated Assessment tool is currently being developed which will incorporate the Equalities assessment as well as other statutory impacts including climate change, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the Fairer Scotland Duty. The tool is currently in the testing phase.

The Equality Act (Scotland) 2010 specifies that councils, education authorities, and licensing boards must:
• Publish a report on the progress of mainstreaming the equality duty every two years
• Report on progress of their equality outcomes every two years

The 2019-2020 Progress Report outlines mainstreaming activities and any action taken by Services which has contributed to delivery of Aberdeenshire's 2017 Equality Outcomes.

The reporting period captures progress from mid-2019 to end 2020, and the Engagement and Equalities team are supporting Services to collate the required information. The Equality Outcomes Working Group has developed a more strategic approach to the 2021 Equality Outcomes which aims to support direct integration of Equalities Outcomes within Service Planning/reporting in a more streamlined and cohesive manner.

Web accessibility regulations came into effect in September 2020, to ensure that content across all content types on our website and graphic/video content is accessible. A rigorous process of ensuring accessibility is in place among Creative Services and website UX team before any content is produced or web pages amended.

The focus on digital technologies has been fundamental to the business continuity of the Council in our response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Digital is a primary focus for the Council in delivering the new priorities and we are actively looking at how we can channel technologies to improve our business, enable economic growth, support the environment and benefit residents while at the same time ensuring that no one is left behind. The EIA underpinning Aberdeenshire's Digital Strategy identifies vulnerable groups with mitigation incorporated into Aberdeenshire's Digital Roadmap. This recognises the commitment to working with partners in building digital confidence with communities, addressing accessibility and connectivity within our sphere of control. The focus on services not buildings requires the need to develop new models for service delivery, often in conjunction with our partners and utilising new technologies. In order to maintain those vital services which address the needs of the most vulnerable in our communities, we will move to self-service coupled with building personal and community resilience. Working with our stakeholders, including customers, will be central to designing new models and process.

The need to continue building digital confidence across the council's workforce is also recognised with actions already progressing to expand the Digital Champion programme and to identifying resources to support employees in developing skills. This forms a central part of the Office Space Strategy and working in partnership with Property & Facilities Management. The needs of the workforce, Elected Members, Partners, and community are an integral factor to the design process including those aspects directly relating to protected characteristics. Outputs from engagement activity undertaken between August and December 2020 continues to inform the future direction of the Office Space Strategy based on the understanding of opportunities and challenges identified by stakeholders as the potential for a blended approach to working between home and office is further considered building on the learning gained from the pandemic and employee feedback.

As a shared service, Commercial & Procurement Shared Service (CPSS) has formed strong strategic partnerships with equalities teams in Aberdeenshire, Aberdeen City and The Highland Councils. Best practice and common approaches to new national policy or case law can be shared as a result of these connections.

The Procurement Reform (Scotland) Act 2014 requires local authorities to comply with the sustainable procurement duty in all regulated contracts. The 2014 Act specifically refers to "reducing inequality in the area" in the definition of "improving wellbeing". CPSS policy and guidance re Community Benefits/Sustainable Procurement has strong focus on the Public Sector Equality Duty, Fair Work Practices and a wide range of other socio-economic considerations designed to alleviate various forms of poverty and disadvantage under the Fairer Scotland Duty and National Performance Framework.

Best practice can be highlighted in Procurement Annual Reports. In addition, CPSS contributes extensively to corporate Equalities Mainstreaming reports, Child Poverty improvement activity,

Best Value audits (as required), Equalities Strategy Board and other corporate initiatives concerning equalities.

When setting the Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy, all savings options are subject to an Equality Impact Assessment and are collated by the Finance Service. A new approach to Cash & Cheque Management across Aberdeenshire will also be subject to an Equalities Impact Assessment.

Internal Audit will continue to provide support, and where appropriate challenge, in the application of the Public Sector Equality Duty through review of associated internal controls and governance arrangements.

Legal & People will continue to monitor and provide advice on issues of equality across the Council. Workforce profiling forms a key activity of workforce planning and all services over the course of the next calendar year will have a better understanding of the staff profile in terms of age, gender, etc. Workforce actions arising from profile analysis will be included in the plans.

In recent years there has been a push to increase opportunities for young people and this has been exacerbated by the disproportional impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on employment prospects for young people. Aberdeenshire Council currently have 300 apprenticeship opportunities for young people, and this has increased in 2020.

Property & Facilities Management give consideration to the Public Sector Equality Duty through the undertaking of an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) to support recommendations and decisions being made in respect of construction activity, use of property assets and the budgetary process.

2.5 Sustainability and climate change commitment

Aberdeenshire Council has committed to working towards being a carbon free society through targets and commitments set down in its Climate Change Declaration. In support of this, the Carbon Budget for the council was set at the meeting of Aberdeenshire Council on 18 March 2020. For Business Services, the target for carbon reduction for 2020/21 was set at 1200 tCO2e, this being 35% of the Council's overall target. Since then, there has been the Covid-19 pandemic which has changed working practices significantly and impacted on achieving the target. Each Service is required to update their policy committee on a 6-monthly basis. The latest update provided to Business Services can be found here.

Across the Service, the majority of Business Services employees have transferred to working from home as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Maximising the use of technology to communicate electronically with customers, partners and community groups has become the norm and has significantly reduced the need for staff travel. Through ongoing stakeholder engagement, the potential for alternative active travel opportunities will be an integral part of the Office Space Strategy. The potential to build on the momentum of doing things differently, where the crisis has produced innovation, where services have adapted, and printing reduced demonstrates our ability to work and serve customers in different ways. Significant progress has been made throughout the pandemic in revising governance structures to allow virtual Policy and Area Committee meetings and to reduce dependence on printing. Opportunities exist to extend sustainable practices into the future and build on the appetite for change.

The Communications team within Customer & Digital Services (C&DS) is working with officers to communicate sustainability targets to internal and external audiences, and through officers supports the work of the Sustainability Committee. The Business Strategy team is engaging

with Economic Development and Zero Waste Scotland to ensure that carbon reduction and circular economy is captured within Directorate Plans and strategic programmes – the Circular Economy forms an integral part of the Office Space Strategy. Sessions are currently being planned for Elected Members.

Commercial & Procurement Shared Services (CPSS) contributes extensively to corporate commitments/wider influence around net zero/biodiversity and circular economy initiatives. As with equalities, CPSS policy and guidance re Community Benefits/Sustainable Procurement has strong focus on carbon/environmental wellbeing beyond basic statutory requirements. E-Learning modules have been developed relating to "Sustainable Procurement/Community Benefits" which provide necessary awareness/training on these areas including "whole of life costing" to officers with delegated procurement authority. CPSS has formed strong strategic partnerships with sustainability/climate teams in Aberdeenshire, Aberdeen City and The Highland Councils. Best practice and common approaches to new national policy or case law can be shared as a result of these connections. Best practice can be highlighted in Procurement Annual Reports. In addition, CPSS provides information annually to the corporate Climate Change return and is directly involved in work of the Scottish Government led "Climate and Procurement Forum" which looks to provide proportionate and relevant business-friendly and procurement orientated solutions to the emerging climate emergency.

Finance is looking at a reduction in printing of Council Tax and Business Rates bills by moving these to electronic bills. Electronic Recovery Notices will also be available. Finance will continue to support both the Property Service and the Capital Plan Group to ensure that Carbon Reduction and the associated monetary savings are considered and captured as part of the budget setting process.

The Energy Management Team within Property & Facilities Management leads the Business Services development of the 2021/22 Carbon Budget to be presented to Council in February 2021. The service main unit is through energy management and energy efficiency aligned to the targets within the Carbon budget together with input to the Council and national indicators to reduce carbon emissions by 75% by 2030 and zero by 2045.

At the start of lockdown in April 2020, the council immediately saw a reduction in electricity consumption of 40% less than the corresponding month in the previous year. As the months progressed electricity consumption dropped to 45% of that seen in the previous year. As Services re-opened in July and August, consumption has now returned to around 90% of 'normal' levels, as there are still some building closures, namely in offices and libraries.

Continual monitoring of energy consumption is carried out by the Energy Management Team and this is reported monthly to the Finance Service to allow them to manage the energy budgets for the Council. At this stage forecasting the final out-turn for 2020/21, for energy usage, carbon, and costs, is being monitored, reviewed, and reported internally monthly.

3. DIRECTORATE PROFILE BUSINESS SERVICES

3.1 Introduction

Business Services delivers a range of services and functions that support the front-line services of the Council and helps them achieve their aims and objectives within the framework of a modern and effective organisation. We have contact with every household and ratepayer in Aberdeenshire through the Revenues Taxation team; we oversee public perception of the council through corporate communications and customer services; we have contact with every employee of the council via Legal & People; and our property team have responsibility for a range of services focussed on managing the council's physical assets. We also have a particular interest in supporting activity in the Formartine and Buchan areas through the Area Managers and their teams.

In providing the breadth of services, we rely on the contribution of each and every colleague throughout Business Services each of whom brings a unique set of skills and talents contributing to the overall effectiveness of the services we provide.

Our workforce demonstrates their commitment to serving our customers by embracing Aberdeenshire Council's "One Aberdeenshire" Principles that represent the cultural aspirations and underpin how we will achieve the Council's vision to be the best council, from mountain to sea. Supporting this, Business Services' vision is: Providing innovative, forward thinking and trusted advice and services to protect and promote the interests of Aberdeenshire Council. We will do this by:

➢ engaging effectively with customers and resident to provide the best services
➢ enabling employees to fulfil their potential by equipping them with the necessary knowledge, skills and tools
➢ promoting good governance by ensuring the right things are done in the right way, by the right people, at the right time
➢ encouraging innovation to create a culture of improvement

Business Services is made up of a number of sub-services:

Area Managers (Buchan & Formartine) - The Area Managers for Buchan and Formartine form part of the Business Services Leadership Team. Aberdeenshire Council has established six areas within which local decisions will be taken locally by elected Members. Each of the six areas has an Area Committee, an Area Manager and an Area Management Team.

The main activities include: leadership of the Area Management Team (AMT); management and operation of Area Committees; working closely with communities and partners to ensure effective plans are developed and delivered (including Community Plans, Locality Plans, Community Action Plans, Resilience Plans and Regeneration plans); Area Projects e.g. placemaking activity and other projects in communities; responsible for community budgets; and ensuring monies received through Developer Obligations are spent within agreed timescales and to the benefit of communities.

Customer & Digital Services (C&DS) is a newly formed service and is an invaluable resource of business intelligence, professional advice, technical expertise and customer service excellence that drives Aberdeenshire towards achieving the Council's priorities. C&DS is made up of the following teams: IT; Business Strategy; Business Change; Customer Services; and Communications & Marketing.

Commercial & Procurement Shared Services (CPSS) is shared with Aberdeenshire, Aberdeen City and The Highland Councils. Through its Procurement Strategy the service will ensure that procurement activity delivers value for money and contributes to the achievement of each of the authority's broader aims and objectives. The key themes of the Joint Procurement Strategy focus on efficiency, governance and improvement. The Council's Procurement Mission Statement commits to delivery of **"**ethical and sustainable value for money solutions that support the operational needs and wider strategic aims of the councils and the communities they service to further local and national priorities to the fullest extent possible".

Finance - the main purpose of the service is to ensure the proper administration and stewardship of public funds. This is discharged through the following functions: Section 95 statutory officer, Revenues; Corporate Finance; Strategic Finance; and Pay & Rewards.

Internal Audit is a statutory requirement under the Local Authority Accounts (Scotland) Regulations 2014 and is provided in accordance with UK Public Sector Internal Audit Standards. It provides high quality professional, objective and independent analysis and advice. Internal Audit supports the Council to achieve its objectives through systematic evaluation of the effectiveness of its governance, risk management and internal control arrangements, and through the promotion of good corporate governance. Internal Audit is a shared service with Aberdeen City Council.

Legal & People is a new service with shared aims to support the organisational customer. The service is made up of the following teams: Advice, Representation, Registration and Elections; Commercial (including Conveyancing and Developer Obligations); Governance (including Committee Services, Information Governance and Licensing); Health, Safety & Wellbeing; Learning & Development; Resourcing; HR (both Transactional & Operational)

Property & Facilities Management aims to provide the delivery of Aberdeenshire Council's Strategic Priorities through the provision of high-quality customer focussed professional property management services. Its objective is to provide the best buildings for Aberdeenshire Council – the Council has 635 operational assets and over 330 investment assets. The impact of the Service is wide ranging but can be segmented into key areas of activity; namely, Property Asset Management (including Estates); Facilities Management; Construction Programme Delivery; and Energy Management.

2.2 Staffing and Workforce Planning

Sub-Service	Headcount	FTE
Directorate	2	1.98
Area Manager - Formartine	8	4.89
Area Manager - Buchan	7	5.89
*Commercial & Procurement Shared Services ***	*26*	*24.2*
Customer & Digital Services	220	201.43
Finance	259	217.48
Internal Audit	12	11.61
Legal & People	177	150.15
Property & Facilities Management	1066	456.83
Support Services	28	25.07
Tackling Poverty & Inequalities	2	1.98
Total	**1780**	**1077.29**

* Staff employed by Aberdeen City Council. Figures are not included in total staff numbers.

The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted on staff deployment during 2020/21.   Significant parts of Business Services in particular the focus on finance, staffing, communications, customer services, contracts/procurement, legal and ICT amongst other services, has drawn resources from those teams to ensure Business Services, the wider Council and the Health and Social Care Partnership can continue to deliver critical services.

Staff across Business Services have continued to work throughout the lockdown with the majority working remotely from home. A number of staff have been remobilised or released from their duties to support activity on the Grampian Covid Assistance Hub or other Covid related essential activity.

As a result of Covid measures, there has been a requirement for a significant increase to the scope of cleaning services. The re-introduction of summer cleaning to schools and also additional daytime cleaning to our educational establishments has necessitated the recruitment of additional cleaning staff.

Workforce Planning
The Business Services workforce has been stable in recent years with a steady growth in headcount. Recruitment and turnover activity are healthy and as expected. There is a relatively low turnover rate at 13% and this is the lowest in the council in fact well under the industry benchmark of 15% which is deemed good. Last year Business Services advertised 365 vacancies and recruited 228 new starts, the application rate was low, but this figure is due to the inclusion of cleaners and relief cleaners.

A breakdown of Business Services employees can be found in the following table and this indicates a reasonable mix of permanent/fixed-term and relief contracts:
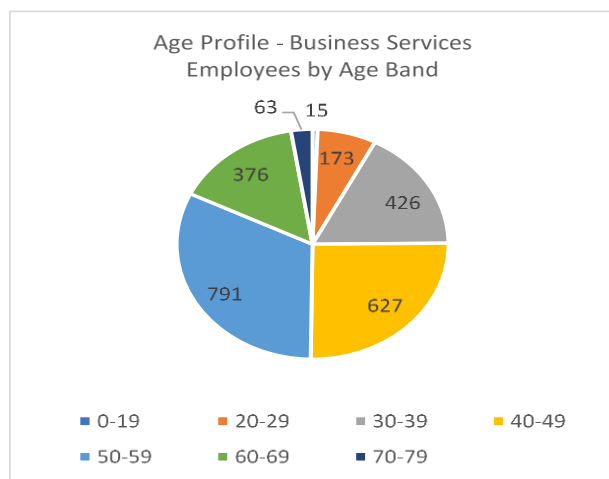
Employment Status

Contract Status	Male		Female	
	Headcount	Full Time Equivalent	Headcount	Full Time Equivalent
Permanent	352	298.3	1234	706.3
Fixed-Term	27	21.3	230	84.3
Relief	78	-	550	-
Total	**457**	**319.6**	**2014**	**791.1**

Total Headcount	**2471**
Total Full Time Equivalent	**1110.7**

Other top line indicators such as average age and length of service also point to a healthy overall picture of the workforce. Further analysis suggests that the Business Services workforce is under-represented in the younger age brackets, and this has been the case for many years. There are over 300 apprenticeship opportunities across the council but only 7 of those are in Business Services. Also, a large proportion of the workforce is over the age of 60 and this combined with the recent voluntary severance programme constitutes a potential risk of loss of experience and skills. This is an indicator that succession planning and talent management should be prioritised within Business Services over the coming years, starting a programme immediately.

Age Profile

Age Profile - Business Services Employees by Age Band

Legend: 0-19, 20-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59, 60-69, 70-79

Average Age = 48

17.8% of Business Services Workforce are aged 60 and over

7.6% of Business Services Workforce are aged under 30.

Service Profile

Length of Service - Business Services Employees by Service Bracket

Legend: 0-9, 10-19, 20-29, 30-39, 40-49

Average Length of Service is 10.4 years

Turnover Rate during 2020 was 13.6%

71 Business Services employees have self-declared a disability, representing 2.9% of the workforce

Sickness across Business Services equated to 6.04 days per employee in 2020.

Although stable for many years the Business Services workforce is entering into a period of change and fluctuation through the voluntary severance and service design programme. This

has the potential to reshape the workforce which will be done through voluntary severance, natural turnover and re-skilling.

The fluctuation in the workforce coupled with the ongoing pandemic response means the wellbeing of the service should be monitored closely. A number of key indicators are used to determine wellbeing and those are absence rates and responses to polls and attitude surveys. There is a slightly heightened absence rate in 2020, although understandable during a pandemic, action will be taken to monitor and improve attendance and wellbeing across the service. Actions to improve pockets of higher absence will be tackled in individual service workforce plans. A wellbeing indicator will be added to the employee attitude survey being issued across Business Services in February to provide a wellbeing baseline for annual measurement.
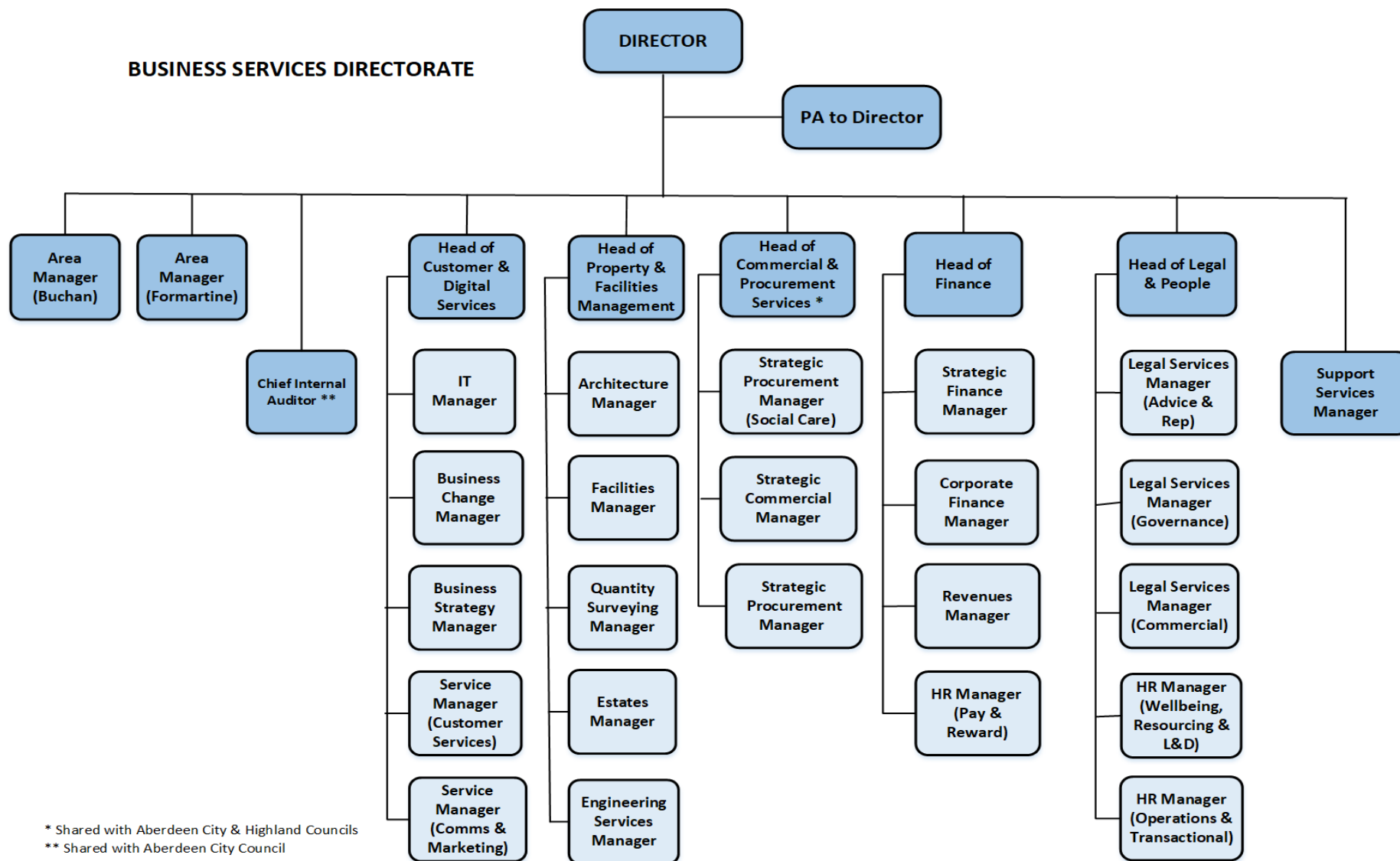
In October 2019 the Business Services workforce were the first to complete the new employee attitude survey. This Survey will be repeated in February 2021 to better understand the impact of the pandemic on the Business Services Workforce.

From the first survey the response rate was good at 47%. The answers indicated a high level of satisfaction within Business Services. The most agreed statement for the whole services related to empowerment, the right skills to do my job and I am clear about what is expected of me in my role. The respondees were least satisfied with the statements related to – career development opportunities and access to learning and development.

Responses from the second survey will be built into future Business Services Action Plans. Detailed workforce plans are under development alongside the programme of service design within individual services in Business Services. This focused workforce planning can either stand alone as a plan or be incorporated into service and team plans and will cover elements such as workforce reshaping and reducing, absence, workforce performance, turnover, recruitment, voluntary severance, re-skilling/redeployment and talent management. Currently within Business Services workforce plans are being developed by Customer and Digital Services. All other services will be done in a phased approach over the next 18 months.

Future skill requirements across Business Services varies considerably depending on each service and functional area. However, there is a common skill requirement across all Business Services and that is the development of digital skills in the workforce. A training needs analysis will indicate more detailed requirements and the detailed picture will emerge once individual service workforce plans have been finalised. In the meantime, to provide a base line for the digital skills audit it is proposed to measure digital confidence across Business Services in February 2021 when the employee attitude survey is issued again.

3.3 Organisational Chart

BUSINESS SERVICES DIRECTORATE

DIRECTOR

PA to Director

Area Manager (Buchan)

Area Manager (Formartine)

Chief Internal Auditor **

Head of Customer & Digital Services

- IT Manager
- Business Change Manager
- Business Strategy Manager
- Service Manager (Customer Services)
- Service Manager (Comms & Marketing)

Head of Property & Facilities Management

- Architecture Manager
- Facilities Manager
- Quantity Surveying Manager
- Estates Manager
- Engineering Services Manager

Head of Commercial & Procurement Services *

- Strategic Procurement Manager (Social Care)
- Strategic Commercial Manager
- Strategic Procurement Manager

Head of Finance

- Strategic Finance Manager
- Corporate Finance Manager
- Revenues Manager
- HR Manager (Pay & Reward)

Head of Legal & People

- Legal Services Manager (Advice & Rep)
- Legal Services Manager (Governance)
- Legal Services Manager (Commercial)
- HR Manager (Wellbeing, Resourcing & L&D)
- HR Manager (Operations & Transactional)

Support Services Manager

* Shared with Aberdeen City & Highland Councils
** Shared with Aberdeen City Council

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3.4 Financial Profile

Revenue Budget 2020 - 2022 Business Services	Base Budget 2020-21 £000	Base Budget 2021-22 £000
Area Manager (Buchan)	425	436
Area Manager (Formartine)	428	439
Customer & Digital Services	13,254	13,558
Directorate & Support Services	1,130	1,164
Finance	5,732	6,057
HR&OD *(Note 1)*	6,327	6,502
Internal Audit	385	403
Legal & People	2,723	2,798
Commercial & Procurement Shared Services	1,419	1,424
Property & Facilities Management *(Note 2)*	6,527	6,462
Tackling Poverty & Inequalities	1,105	1,118
	39,455	**40,361**
Other Budget Pages included within Business Services *(Note 3)*	(772)	1,472
Revenue Budget agreed at Full Council in March 2020	**38,683**	**41,833**

Note 1
HR&OD Budget Page will be split and reported within Finance and Legal & People pages in 2021-22

Note 2
The figure provided for P&FM is net budget, gross budget 2020/21 amounted to £32.034 million

Note 3
The following Budgets are included within the agreed Business Services Revenue Budget but no separate section included within Business Services Directorate Plan:

Chief Executive	335	345
Councillors' Remuneration & Expenses	2,229	2,290
Grampian Joint Valuation Board	2,103	2,124
Charges to HRA, Capital & Other	(5,439)	(3,287)
	(772)	**1,472**
Capital Budget 2020 – 2022 *(Note 4)*	**25,963**	**53,958**

Note 4
Business Services lead on the delivery of the overall Capital Plan

3.5 Efficiency savings

Through on-going self-evaluation areas for improvement will be highlighted. In addition, the Service will undertake Service Reviews to identify areas where efficiencies can be realised leading to a reduction in expenditure or an increase in income generation. During the preparation of the Business Services Revenue Budget these areas are put to Councillors for consideration and when agreed budgets are amended. The Revenue Budget will be considered by Full Council on 4 March 2021.

The workforce implications of efficiency savings will be reported to committee through the performance measures contained within the Directorate Action Plan and future bulletins where appropriate. Ongoing workforce and trade union engagement will continue to take place.

3.6 Consultation and Engagement

During the preparation of this Plan, Business Services Leadership Team held three workshops with Elected Members from Business Services Committee. The purpose of the workshops was to identify and endorse the four priorities that Business Services has responsibility for and to agree the required actions and performance measures that would sit under each priority to ensure delivery. This final version of the Directorate Plan reflects these consultations.

Employee and trade union consultation will take place regularly as the Directorate Plan actions are progressed. This is a key document for engagement with the workforce on the future direction of their service.

3.7 Peer review

A Peer Review of this Plan has been carried out by Strategic Leadership Team who have been a "critical friend" in terms of the information contained with the Plan and have provided feedback which has been incorporated as appropriate.

4. DIRECTORATE PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK

4.1 Performance

Aberdeenshire Council aims to be the best in Scotland and we support this by setting challenging targets and benchmarking our performance against the best-performing local authorities.

Business Services uses the Council's performance management system to record, monitor, compare and report on progress and performance. Information input is sourced from various internal information systems with the performance management system providing the mechanism to turn this information into reports, scorecards etc for presentation to Policy Committees, Area Committees, Leadership Teams, Boards and for external scrutiny.

Business Services reports its performance on projects, actions and measures which support the priorities on a six-monthly basis to the Business Services Committee. These reports can be found on Aberdeenshire Council's website along with the Best Value Assurance Report. Recommendations within these reports will be used to strengthen our approach to performance.

Appendix 2 details the actions/projects and performance measures which relate to and support the delivery of the four priorities that Business Services has responsibility for and also details the priorities and areas for improvement in relation to Tackling Poverty & Inequalities.

4.2 Benchmarking

In addition to reporting performance to committee, Business Services also contributes to the Aberdeenshire Council response to key national trends against the Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF) annual statutory performance indicators.

The Local Government Benchmarking Framework is a common set of performance indicators that are measured for every Scottish Council. The indicators focus on core service delivery areas such as schools, leisure facilities, waste collection, roads maintenance and disposal and collection of council tax. The council can use the indicators as a basis for working and learning with other Scottish local authorities in order to improve service delivery. Each year we highlight the improvement activity we are undertaking through the Local Government Benchmarking Framework on our website.

Residents can see how Aberdeenshire Council is performing in comparison to other Scottish local authorities through the mylocalcouncil website.

The latest LGBF benchmarking information relating to Business Services, including the Scottish Average and National Ranking, can be found in Appendix 1 to this Plan. Further analysis of these measures, in particular those currently sitting in quartile three or four, will be undertaken. Where action is to be taken to improve the measure(s), this will be incorporated into our Directorate Action Plan and specific updates on how we would propose to deal with those will be brought forward as part of the regular performance reporting to Business Services Committee.

4.3 Where are we now? Self-Evaluation, Positive messages, Areas for Improvement

As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, Business Services was required to make rapid changes to the way it works to ensure continuity of service. In addition, and in reaction to the new Council Priorities and publication of Aberdeenshire's Best Value Audit, Business Services conducted a light-touch self-evaluation exercise in December 2020 with the extended Business Services Leadership Team. This took the form of a survey with specific questions asked around two themes: how well do we meet the needs of our stakeholders; and what is our capacity for improvement.

Responses identified a significant number of areas of good practice across the Service as well as acknowledging areas where we could improve. The main themes in relation to areas for improvement across the Service are:

- Better partnership/collaborative working – with internal and external partners
- More robust performance management framework
- Better use of benchmarking data
- A more strategic approach to workforce planning
- Learning from other authorities
- Stronger leadership around prioritisation

The Areas for Improvement have been incorporated into our Directorate Action Plan as set out in Appendix 2. For information, each part of the Service will have their own detailed and discrete action plan that supplements the Directorate Action Plan.

The table below provides a summary of progress for each sub-service:

Customer & Digital Services (C&DS)	Where are we now?
	• Work continues to establish the new service, including service re-design and engaging with customers about future requirements
	• When Covid-19 lockdown began in March, the team shifted its focus onto critical activities – supporting the Grampian Assistance Centre, supporting a seismic shift to remote working, ensuring clear and timely communications and managing increased demands on our IT network
	• Service Points will re-open in line with Government guidance and plans are being put in place to ensure we provide safe arrangements for our staff and customers
	Positive messages
	• A resilient IT infrastructure and established cloud-based systems have enabled a successful transition to large-scale home working

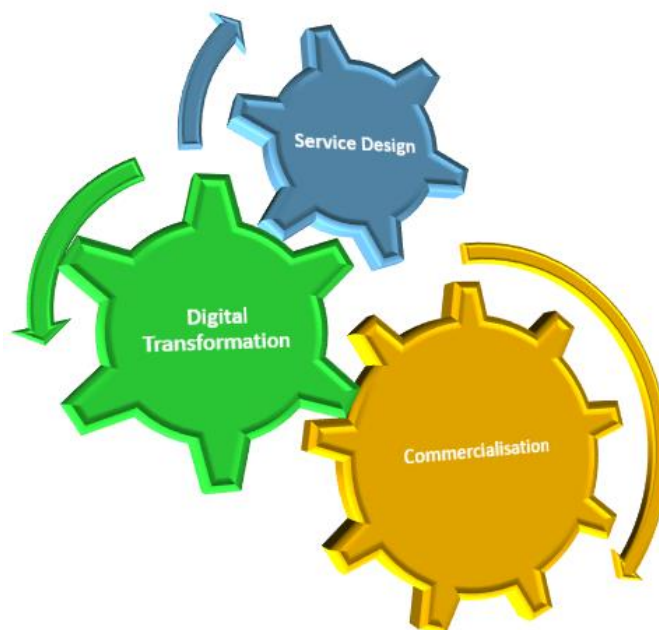|	
	• Supported the rapid development and implementation of IT systems to support the multi-agency Grampian Covid Assistance Hub • Designed Area/community engagement sessions with outputs feeding into the Community Impact Assessment • Supported the Best Value process - undertook digital How Good Is Our Governance (HGIOG) self-evaluation including Audit Committee focus • Supported Elected Members and senior management with refreshing the Council priorities • Developed and implemented the performance management framework including Directorate and Area Plan templates • Developed Corporate Improvement Action Plan in response to Best Value, HGOIG and Annual Governance Statement
Commercial & Procurement Shared Services (CPSS)	**Where are we now?**
	• Priority focus has been ensuring stability and business continuity of the Council's supply chain particularly with those suppliers with whom the Council has high dependency on for the delivery of business-critical services • The Annual Procurement Performance Report which has focus on metrics around financial efficiencies, social value outcomes (community benefits) and the development of the local supply chain has been reported to all Policy Committees during the first quarter of calendar year 2021. Reporting on circular economy and carbon reduction initiatives will be reported to Committee during Autumn 2021
	Positive messages
	• Assessment under the nationally audited Procurement Capability & Improvement Programme (PCIP) shows that Aberdeenshire Council has remained in the highest rated performance quartile across 32 Scottish Councils for the last 12 years • Covid recovery and Brexit represent the major local and national policy issues affecting the service area in recent months and for the foreseeable future. CPSS teams have absorbed and applied a considerable amount of policy/best practice and regulation • CPSS has demonstrated agile and proactive responses to ensure business continuity in the midst of the pandemic which has played a significant part in safeguarding the resilience of suppliers/local suppliers and contributed positively to the future growth of local economies in Aberdeenshire • In terms of the Covid response, the Council has supported 96 providers of critical services (approx. 72 contracts) and 192 providers of non-critical services (approx. 160 contracts) in Aberdeenshire. In addition, the social care commissioning and contracts team has supported 56 providers of critical services (approx. 90 contracts) and 38 providers of non-critical services (approx. 57 contracts) in Aberdeenshire
Finance	**Where are we now?**
	• The current year has created a financial crisis which has necessitated each part of Finance to adopt a central role with the provision of advice and service

	• Finance has reported more regularly and in greater detail on financial data to enable service delivery decisions to be made; a greater leniency when issuing and collecting debts, the ability to adapt resources to administer new grant schemes and ensure that suppliers and staff are paid accurately and on time
	Positive messages
	• One of the few Councils to meet its statutory deadline for the completion of the annual accounts resulting in an unmodified set of accounts signed off by Audit Scotland • The Revenues team prepared and issued all Council Tax bills and Business Rates bills in an environment of late and changing legislation. Approx. 4,000 business grants totalling more than £43 million were assessed and paid out as a brand-new process • The Strategic Finance Team have also taken on additional responsibilities by processing crisis grants, free school meal payments and hardship grants all within specific and tight timescales • Finance undertook a number of civil contingency responsibilities including Chairing the Civil Contingency Recovery Group for the Local Resilience Partnership and Chairing the Support for People and Incident Management Team during the Stonehaven Rail Derailment
Internal Audit	**Where are we now?**
	• There is a statutory requirement under the Local Authority Accounts (Scotland) Regulations 2014 to operate a professional and objective internal auditing service in accordance with UK Public Sector Internal Audit Standards. An annual self-assessment is undertaken, which identified in 2019/20 that the service generally complies with the Standards. Peer reviews are undertaken every 5 years. A quality assurance and improvement plan was set out and has been implemented to move towards full compliance where appropriate • An Internal Audit Plan is agreed with Audit Committee annually and progress with delivering the Plan is reported regularly • In 2019/20 the service reported a general improvement in the performance measures compared to previous years
	Positive messages
	• Internal Audit has continued to provide support, advice and an appropriate level of assurance. This has included support and advice in respect of Covid related business grant schemes, investigations, and continued delivery of a programme of planned audit reports
Legal & People	**Where are we now?**
	• A newly formed service, parts of HR&OD have joined with Legal and Governance to form Legal and People. Although a particular challenge during a pandemic with most staff working from home, the merger has successfully taken place and work begins to better understand customer expectations, harnessing digital efficiencies and building on the learning from the last year

	- Our services have readily adapted to the new working environment, for example providing much of our learning content online and dealing with Sheriff Court actions through Webex - Key priorities such as workforce planning, and staff mobilisation have taken significant steps forward as the challenges of service prioritisation have been better understood and actioned - Registrars are largely operating digitally and commercial activities have continued remotely - New governance arrangements have enabled significant advancements in relation to virtual meetings of the council's committees
	Positive messages
	- Robust governance arrangements promote clarity, stability and innovation as evidenced during the pandemic. The service demonstrates the ability to adapt, for example the overnight change to largely digital engagement across the board with clients and stakeholders and the swift move to virtual Committee meetings during lockdown - Supporting the transition to an increasingly flexible, multi-skilled workforce and building on the agility and pro-activity of our employees during pandemic response are key workforce objectives. Providing and supporting options for employees' future careers, skills and voluntary severance are key components of the coming year. Likewise, the continued support and guidance for all employees around the increasing critical issues of health and wellbeing culture, systems and processes remain central to the work of the team - A Local Government By-Election took place as scheduled in October 2020 and the observations of the Electoral Commission were that the by-election was well run under the difficult circumstances we are currently living in
Property & Facilities Management	**Where are we now?**
	- The Council was commended as part of the recent Best Value for its approach to Estate Rationalisation. The methodology has informed the approach to the wider Estate Modernisation agenda - The current pandemic has had an impact on occupation, demand and financial challenges around rental income - Within Facilities Management, there are current reviews that will result in a more integrated service for Soft FM, whilst Hard FM will see the service likely to be re-procured in the near future - Construction Programmes have increased in recent years across both General Capital and Housing Capital Plans. This is scheduled to continue in future years
	Positive messages
	- The Service continued to optimise the number of operational properties with a reduction over the last decade from 848 to 635 operational assets. The approach to Estate Rationalisation was commended by Best Value Auditors - Occupancy levels for commercial and industrial properties remained buoyant. At over 90% - Around 48,000 response and planned preventative maintenance tasks are delivered each year, whilst there remains significant activity across both Housing and General Capital Plans

4.4 Where do we need to be?

A Business Services Transformation Programme exists to ensure that the professional support we provide to the council continues to be valued and supportive of the Council's priorities and service ambitions. It is also an opportunity to be bold and innovative in our approach to streamline processes and deliver significant benefits to the organisation through modern and effective working practices.

Recognising the financial context in which we are working, along with opportunities to modernise our processes, our focus for improvement will sit across three themes:

- **Commercialisation** – providing professional services that can be offered externally to generate income, to offset costs and reduce the pressures on budgets
- **Digital Transformation** – making use of digital technologies to change and improve a business model
- **Service Re-design** – planning and organising people, infrastructure, communication and component parts of a service to improve its quality

By reviewing each of our service areas with these themes, we will strive to deliver modern and effective professional services that are fit for purpose, driving efficiencies and delivering savings. This plan has been developed as a two-year plan with clear targets and deliverables. This is a live and rolling plan that evolves over time and will incorporate indicative proposals for future years as they are developed.

The overarching aim is to deliver Best Value high quality professional services.

5. RISKS

Fundamental to delivering the ambitions of the new Council Priorities and the Business Services Directorate Plan 2020-2022 is the way the Aberdeenshire Council implements robust management of risks and opportunities.

In Aberdeenshire Council, Risk Registers are currently maintained at a Corporate, Directorate and Operational level which are reviewed at Service and Directorate Management Teams, with progress reported to Corporate Risk Management Steering Group. Risks which require urgent escalation are reported to Senior Leadership Team for monitoring with the most significant risks the Councils' face being reported to appropriate Committees for oversight, scrutiny, and monitoring. The current Corporate and Directorate Risk Registers can be found here.

Following the establishment of the new Risk and Resilience Team in January 2020 and the refreshed set of Council Priorities, a full review of the Risk and Resilience service of Aberdeenshire Council is currently in progress with expected completion in Spring 2021. The review is considering governance, assurance, accountability, strategies, policies, frameworks, processes, and procedures associated with the Risk Management and Resilience service. Aberdeenshire Council is dedicated to developing a proactive approach to the management of risk in the context of:

- compliance with statutory obligations
- ensure Council priorities, Directorate Plans, agreed policy objectives and best practice guidance are achieved and maintained
- empower council services to be proactive in the monitoring and ownership of risk in order to provide clear and effective lines of assurance and accountability
- maintain effective control of public funds and efficient and effective harnessing of resources whilst striving to maintain best value
- identify, manage, and implement mitigation measures against potential liabilities
- prioritise areas for service provision improvement and encourage meeting and exceeding customer, stakeholder and community expectations
- protection of staff, service users, pupils, tenants, members of the communities, elected members and all other stakeholders the Council has a duty of care for
- dedication to improving climate change and mitigating against environmental risk
- ensure preservation and champion the promotion of Aberdeenshire Council's reputation
- protect its corporate assets including knowledge, buildings, equipment, vehicles, and resources
- identify lessons and learn from previous threats, opportunities, successes and failures to inform future management of risks

It has become widely recognised that the management of risk is everyone's responsibility. Whilst the review is under way, assurance can be provided that as part of business-as-usual activity, Service and Directorate Teams continue to monitor, manage and report on risk across all Services.

Whilst the Council is committed to continuously horizon scanning for new and emerging risks, it must be acknowledged that some risk and associated mitigation measures lie outside the control of the Aberdeenshire Council. Aberdeenshire Council seeks to reduce and mitigate against the Council's exposure to risk where practicable, recognising that some mitigation measures may be the responsibility of third parties or partner agencies.

6. OPPORTUNITIES

The focus for Business Services is moving forward and continuing to deliver high quality services and support. The Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on how we have worked during the last year, with many positive changes put in place to allow us to continue working and maintain delivery of key services. We need to capitalise on and further develop these changed ways of working to ensure we continue to provide high quality professional and business support fit for the future. Some of the identified opportunities within Business Services are:

Customer & Digital Services:
- Through stakeholder engagement the Shaping our Service process has resulted in a new vision and identified opportunities to determine our service priorities to better meet customer requirements. This is leading to a workforce planning process to ensure we have the right people in the right place with a commitment to providing employee development aligned to the direction of our service. Developing our core services, providing access to resources and toolkits to better equip and embed project management, change and improvement.
- Aberdeenshire's Digital Strategy sets the direction for Aberdeenshire's digital future, with the roadmap and governance framework being key enablers to driving forward the actions which will contribute to fundamentally changing the way services are delivered and accessed by customers. The strategy also brings a focus to digital accessibility and inclusion across our communities working with partners to bring about positive outcomes for our citizens.

Finance:
- Through new ways of working the service has been able to accelerate the pace of change and this has provided the opportunity to re-set and reshape the way in which we provide information and advice across a range of specialist areas – accountancy, insurance risk and resilience.
- Through the digital strategy there are also opportunities to enhance the use of technology, back-office integration, automation and data analysis so that future decision-making is evidence led.

Legal & People:
- Digital Strategy, service design and workforce planning over the next 18 months provide Business Services with an opportunity to understand existing and future skills and legal and digital services will put in place more robust development programmes at all stages, entry level into new and existing skills, career broadening, developing and re-skilling opportunities.
- Build on best practice gained through the move to virtual working, improve productivity and reduce travel consistent with the Council's carbon budget.
- Continue to explore opportunities for commercialisation within the Legal & People teams.
- Opportunities will arise through the Voluntary Severance programme for further service design, restructuring and improved performance.

Property & Facilities Management:
As part of the Estate Modernisation priority, the aims and objectives are to align to Service requirements, Communities and Place:
- Assets are Safe and Fit for Purpose
- Meet Climate Change Targets
- Commercial Portfolio to support the Aberdeenshire economy and income generation
- Optimise property running costs
- Efficient Asset Disposal

APPENDIX 1: BUSINESS SERVICES 2019/2020 LGBF SUMMARY
(REPORTING TO BUSINESS SERVICES POLICY COMMITTEE)

National Indicator	Scottish Average	Aberdeenshire	Status	Long Trend	Short Trend	National Ranking	Quartile Position
SCORPAM01: Proportion of operational buildings that are suitable for their current use %	82.24%	74.96%	Red	Improving	Improving	28	Four
SCORPAM02: Proportion of internal floor area of operational buildings in satisfactory condition %	87.44%	87.56%	Green	Improving	Improving	20	Three
SCORP01: Support services as a % of total gross expenditure	4.08%	3.11%	Green	Improving	Improving	3	One
SCORP03b: The percentage of the highest paid 5% employees who are women	56.6%	67.1%	Green	Improving	Improving	1	One
SCORP03c: The gender pay gap (%)	0.00%	-1.42%	Green	Improving	Improving	2	One
SCORP04: The cost per dwelling of collecting Council Tax	£6.50	£7.61	Red	Improving	Declining	22	Three
SCORPR06a: Sickness Absence Days per teacher	6.34	5.94	Green	Declining	Declining	16	Two
SCORPR06b: Sickness Absence Days per employee (non-teacher)	11.89	9.85	Green	Declining	Improving	5	One
SCORP07: Percentage of income due from council tax received by the end of the year	95.75%	96.34%	Green	Improving	Declining	15	Two
SCORP08: % of invoices sampled that were paid within 30 days	91.7%	90.69%	Amber	Improving	Declining	20	Three
SECON04: % of procurement spend spent on local enterprises	28.51%	22.15%	Red	Declining	Declining	21	Three
SFINSUS1 Total useable reserves as a percentage of council annual budgeted revenue	16.45%	8.23%	Red	Declining	Declining	21	Three
SFINSUS2 Uncommitted General Fund Balance as a % of council annual budgeted net revenue	4.58%	1.59%	Red	Declining	Declining	19	Three
SFINSUS3 Ratio of Financing Costs to Net Revenue Stream – General Fund	7.09	6.62	Green	Improving	Improving	13	Two
SFINSUS4 Ratio of Financing Costs to Net Revenue Stream – Housing Revenue Account	21.96	12.67	Green	Improving	Improving	6	One
SFINSUS5 Actual outturn as a percentage of budgeted expenditure	99.19%	100.02%	Green	Declining	Improving	2	One

BUSINESS SERVICES' DIRECTORATE ACTION PLAN 2021-22

Council priority/service priority	Key Action	Anticipated outcome	Performance measure	Responsible person	Timescale
STRATEGIC					
Effective delivery of the Council's priorities through a programme of digital innovation and web-based services (Resilient Communities)	Improve telephony service	Customers have greater choice accessing online self-serve options reducing Contact Centre demand	Reduction in call wait times	Head of Customer & Digital Services	31 March 2022
	Implement and develop automated online customer chat.	Capacity released in the Contact Centre directed to supporting more vulnerable customers through telephony service	Reduction in abandoned calls No of successful customer automated chats		31 March 2022
	Delivering improved and broader range of online services for the benefit of customers		Deliver new/improved online services as identified against an agreed prioritised programme of work with additional services identified as part of the programme. • Bulky Uplifts • Private Water Supply • Additional Bin Requests • Licenses		30 April 2021 30 April 2021 30 April 2021 30 June 2021

Council priority/service priority	Key Action	Anticipated outcome	Performance measure	Responsible person	Timescale
			• New Bin Requests • Damaged Bins Reporting		30 June 2021 31 December 2021
	Upgrade the council's Wide Area Network (WAN)	Increased connection speeds to over 300 schools, offices and other council sites	WAN upgrade delivered	Head of Customer & Digital Services	31 March 2022
	Develop a prioritised programme of key business systems to be reviewed to maximise functionality, upgrade or replace in alignment with Aberdeenshire's Digital Strategy	Key business systems contribute to delivering improved service efficiency and effectiveness. Prioritised programme of business systems identified for improvement or replacement. Streamlined processes contribute to improved efficiency and effectiveness	Prioritised programme of work to improve key business systems agreed	Head of Customer & Digital Services	31 May 2021
	Develop learning opportunities supporting employees to build digital confidence utilising O365	Employees are confident using a range of O365 packages	Employees report increased confidence in their digital skills	Head of Customer & Digital Services	31 March 2022

Council priority/service priority	Key Action	Anticipated outcome	Performance measure	Responsible person	Timescale
Our workforce plans are sustainable, affordable and supports employee wellbeing (Health and wellbeing) (links to Business Service self-evaluation)	Supporting services to create and deliver Workforce Plans	Successful implementation of the Workforce Plans	Workforce Plans to be integrated within Directorate Plans	Head of Legal & People	31 March 2021
	Understand and monitor Business Service Workforce wellbeing and the impact of the pandemic and changes brought about by service design, digital innovation and voluntary severance Invest in the Business Services workforce to maximise key skills such as resilience to ensure the service continues to thrive	Workforce wellbeing indicators established included in BS employees attitude survey and appropriate action taken on the results Workforce wellbeing and productivity levels and maintain or increase	Wellbeing indicators report positive trend year on year because of wellbeing action taken corporately and specifically in Business Services	Head of Legal & People	28 February 2022
	Digital confidence is measured to establish a base line for skills development	Digital confidence question is added to the BS employee attitude survey	Digital confidence is monitored through survey and improves year on year	Head of Customer and Digital Services	28 February 2022
	As the younger demographic are underrepresented in the BS workforce action is	Increase apprenticeship and trainee opportunities in Business services to 1%	Increase in the number of employees aged 30 and under.	Head of Legal & People	31 March 2022

Council priority/service priority	Key Action	Anticipated outcome	Performance measure	Responsible person	Timescale
	required to improved opportunities for young people to enter the BS workforce. Only 7 apprentice opportunities currently in Business Services along with other trainee positions.	of workforce which equates to 25 opportunities.			
	Better understanding of future service and workforce requirements across business services through the development of an 18-month service design and workforce planning programme	Reshaped workforce brought about by reskilling, natural turnover and voluntary severance.	Reshaping of the BS workforce Transparent employee and TU engagement	Director of Business Services	Summer 2022
	Better understanding of succession planning and talent management to plan for anticipated skill gaps as a result of the age profile and VS exercise in Business Services	Reduce the impact on service delivery as a result of retirement and VS and improve employee attitude results on career development question	Increase in the employee attitude score on the question of career development.	Director of Business Services	28 February 2022
	Once agreed in March 2021, gain a better understanding of the impact the budget will have on the shape of the Business Services workforce	Workforce engagement and transparency	Engaging in successful workforce transformation whilst maintaining morale, to be tested through TU liaison, employee polls and	Director of Business Services	Summer 2022

Council priority/service priority	Key Action	Anticipated outcome	Performance measure	Responsible person	Timescale
	Engage with the Business Services workforce and trade unions on the impacts outlined above		attitude surveys, turnover, etc		
Income is maximised through reducing costs alongside commercialisation (Responsible finances)	Completion of an Interim Commercial Strategy to 2022	A realism about what we are aiming to achieve e.g. identify what is 'commercial' e.g. car park charges, music fees, full cost recovery, differential pricing or a more aggressive push to charge for officer time as well as services?	The actual level of income generated by the Strategy	Initially Head of Central Procurement Shared Service, then each affected budget holder	30 June 2021
	Identify opportunities for generating income through service reviews	It is fundamental that the service review drives the business activity and therefore the potential income stream, rather than setting an arbitrary target. Service knowledge is vital. Equally though, there will be an expectation on a service to generate income through current and new opportunities.	The actual level of income generated from the current and new opportunities	Initially Head of Central Procurement Shared Service then each affected budget holder	30 June 2021
	Implementation of the Charging Policy	Demonstrable link to the new Charging Policy	Compliance with the policy through reporting	Initially Head of Finance	30 June 2021

Council priority/service priority	Key Action	Anticipated outcome	Performance measure	Responsible person	Timescale
		driven again by Service Plans. This policy must be real and not just a document. It must be flexible and must be tailored to each service activity rather than just a blanket policy which services try to fit into. Differential pricing for swimming or hire of halls or special waste uplifts should be considered and perhaps rejected but need to open up an inclusive discussion to promote ownership.	to Committee and meeting all review dates	then each affected budget holder	
	Promote new ways of generating income e.g. through alternative delivery models, risk and reward, sponsorship and advertising	A more contemporary approach to the topic of income but linked to the Strategy and Policy above. This key action will enable creative thinking to take place outwith the confines of an agreed strategy and policy; i.e. allowing the strategy and policy to work whilst giving officers the	The adoption and inclusion of new ideas then the actual income generated from these	Initially Head of Central Procurement Shared Service then each affected budget holder	30 June 2021

Council priority/service priority	Key Action	Anticipated outcome	Performance measure	Responsible person	Timescale
		forum to raise and test ideas			
We have an estate that is sustainable, efficient, and fit for purpose (Estate Modernisation)	Review and update Service Strategies i.e. working with Council service to identify their future asset requirements	Update Service asset management strategies to reflect current, and emerging, best practice to include key Asset Drivers concerning service delivery along with future management, and operation, arrangements.	Asset Based Strategies, which identify assets for retention, and investment, and those which are under performing; surplus to requirements; do not contribute to Council strategic priorities etc. Informed Investment Programme where facilities for retention and investment are highlighted and projects/works arising incorporated within Capital Plan, Planned Maintenance Programmes etc.	Heads of Service	31 March 2021
	Identifying Shared Need across the Council and wider Public Sector	Identify synergies with other assets; internal, partners and community identifying shared need, building in consideration of impact on localities/areas on a cross service basis	In development	Principal Asset Management Officer	30 June 2021

Council priority/service priority	Key Action	Anticipated outcome	Performance measure	Responsible person	Timescale
	Undertake an Asset Challenge for the need for the assets	Review & Retention (Default position for more effective and efficient use of existing assets as opposed to new assets)	In development	Commercial Development Manager	30 June 2021
	Corporate Asset Management Plan to be updated	Update and develop wilder corporate asset management strategies in the wider management of Aberdeenshire's build estate. This will support Service(s) needs and support opportunities to rationalise and modernise	In development	Principal Asset Management Officer	30 September 2021
	Identify programme of Asset Disinvestment	Asset Release, disinvestment, disposal taking cognisance of vacant building holding costs, ensuring the Disposal Process is effective in securing capital receipts, removing liabilities and takes account of local factors (eg Community Asset Transfer)	In development	Asset Disposal Surveyor	Ongoing process
	Complete the review of the Capital Plan	Continue to deliver and Review Capital Plan	In development	Head of Property & FM	30 September 2021